

Institutes of Health, NIH, already supports.

This law authorizes the NIH to establish a number of multi-institution consortia conducting high-impact research into the most challenging pediatric issues of our day. These research networks will allow for the participation of multiple institutions through the use of a ‘hub and spoke’ arrangement, with one or more central pediatric medical centers collaborating with other supporting sites.

Network applicants can focus on any type of pediatric research agenda, from basic laboratory research through later stage translational research and clinical investigations on a variety of pediatric disorders and diseases.

Importantly, the act will bridge the research gap between pediatric and adult conditions. Only 5 to 10 percent of the NIH’s annual research budget is devoted to pediatric research, despite children comprising approximately 20 percent of the U.S. population.

Additionally, this act promises to strengthen our collective focus on pediatric rare diseases or conditions, such as spinal muscular atrophy, muscular dystrophy, Down syndrome, and Fragile X.

We are all aware that the NIH faces tight budgets and that these fiscal challenges are not going away overnight. Thus, Members on both sides of the aisle came together in support of this research model to promote efficiency and the sharing of resources. Modeled after the successful Cancer Centers and other successful networked initiatives, this law reflects the current fiscal climate and seeks to do more with less.

The National Pediatric Research Network Act could not have been enacted without the support of thousands of families, care providers, pediatric researchers and research institutions across the country. I would especially like to thank FightSMA and the Coalition for Pediatric Medical Research for organizing a grassroots effort that led to strong bipartisan support in both houses of Congress, and to Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, Nationwide Children’s Hospital in Columbus, and Akron Children’s Hospital for their endorsement and hard work in support of the bill.

The legislation received the strong support of Parent Project Muscular Dystrophy, the Children’s Hospital Association, Federation of Pediatric Organizations, Kakkis EveryLife Foundation, National Down Syndrome Society, and the National Organization for Rare Disorders.

Finally, I would like to recognize Madison Reed, a valiant Ohio teenager living with SMA, for sharing her story with me when I visited Nationwide Children’s Hospital earlier this year. The National Pediatric Research Network Act has given hope to thousands of families like hers, across Ohio and the country, that collaborative pediatric research will speed knowledge

from bench to bedside, allowing young people with medical concerns to lead healthier and fuller lives.

TRIBUTE TO JACK HANNA

Mr. PORTMAN. Madam President, today I wish to honor “Jungle” Jack Hanna for his 35 years of service to the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. Jack is a world-renowned conservationist, author, television personality, lifelong adventurer, and champion of the Columbus Zoo.

In 1978, Jack Hanna joined a small zoo in Columbus, Ohio as the executive director. The challenges he faced as director were staggering. The zoo was outdated, the animals had little contact with the outside world, and the attendance was low. Jack worked to increase attendance by offering educational and entertainment programs at the zoo. Under his leadership, the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium became the world-class facility it is today. The Columbus Zoo is a state-of-the-art park with exceptional attractions such as Zoombezi Bay waterpark and Jungle Jack’s Landing. The park has also expanded its reach outside of Columbus to include The Wilds near Cambridge, OH.

Jack’s work as a conservationist has saved endangered animals and habitats around the globe. He helped found Partners in Conservation, and is an active supporter of St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, the Mountain Gorilla Veterinary Project, and the SeaWorld Busch Gardens Conservation Fund.

Jack was named director emeritus in 1992 of the Columbus Zoo but has continued to spur economic development and promote central Ohio since that time. Jack has made countless television appearances since 1983 on shows such as “Good Morning America,” the “Late Show with David Letterman,” FOX News programs, and CNN News programs. We still watch him today on his latest syndicated TV series, “Jack Hanna’s Into the Wild.”

I have had the opportunity to meet with Jack over the years and have witnessed his genuine love of animals and wildlife firsthand. He is a passionate advocate for conservation, and his skill for sharing the majesty of nature has opened the minds of millions of readers, viewers, and listeners.

The Columbus Zoo is an asset to central Ohio because of Jack Hanna’s work and inspiration. I congratulate him on his service to our State.

TRIBUTE TO NICHOLE DISTEFANO

Mrs. MCCASKILL. Madam President, as we come to the end of 2013, I wish to pay tribute to a friend and a stellar long-term staff member of mine, Nichole Distefano. Nichole left my office earlier this year to pursue an exceptional opportunity with the Environmental Protection Agency. She spent more than 6 years as an indispen-

sable member of my Washington, DC, staff and was an exceptional member of staffs of mine going back to 2004.

Nichole is affectionately known as “H” in our office, initially because of the “h” in her first name and later for reasons best not shared on the Senate floor but related to her tenacity and direct nature. Nichole was the absolute rock and foundation of our legislative staff during her tenure.

She was, in fact, the first legislative aide that I hired. It did not matter—although was a shock to some—that she had no previous experience in DC. I knew she would dive right into her responsibilities with attention to detail and skill. In fact, within 2 years on the staff, she assumed responsibility for my government reform portfolio, which encompassed the issues that I focused on most intently during my first 6 years in the Senate. During that time we promoted her four times and continually increased her responsibility. In each case, she performed beyond even my highest expectations. There was no challenge and no issue Nichole could not tackle.

Nichole’s policy accomplishments are too many to number. She was our lead staffer on earmark reform work; whistleblower legislation for both Federal employees and contractors; our complex regulatory reform efforts; everything and anything that had to do with empowering our inspectors general. She led all the office work on screening policies at the airports along with handling innumerable challenging situations with the GSA in regards to Missouri and was the lead staffer in writing bills to curb some of the excesses that we discovered in that Agency. She also patiently waded through all of the difficult policy and politics of energy issues, including the challenging and politically sensitive debate on cap and trade. There was no detail too small for Nichole to master and no nuance she could not grasp. One of her earliest policy responsibilities had to do with an energy issue much smaller than cap and trade, however. She prepared legislation dealing with the measurement of gasoline as it relates to temperature—hot gas was not the most exciting issue. It involved no bright lights and no headlines, just hard, complicated, solid, public policy work—the exact kind of thing Nichole thrived at. Those issues that take more than a cut-and-paste memo were Nichole’s specialty.

I have known Nichole since she was 8 years old, as the granddaughter of a strong public servant, Carole Roper Park Vaughn, who served with me in the Missouri State Legislature. As Nichole ran around Carole’s Jefferson City office, Carole helped instill in her that leadership spark. In 2004, when I ran for Governor, I hired Nichole for the first time to help run our Kansas City volunteer crew. By the end, most people on staff thought she was the one really running our KC office—and for all intent and purposes, she was.

By our 2006 Senate race, she became my rural outreach director, helping us